NOVEMBER 1987

Equity Matters

University of Toronto

Status of Women Office / Office of the President

The third issue of this newsletter has been put together amid campus headlines on topics ranging from employment equity in academic hiring policy and practice to sexism in student orientation activities to problems in recognizing and funding the Women's Centre. Clearly we do not lack for subject matter.

The Status of Women Office is grateful to the Ontario Work-Study Plan for the assistance of Chris Bracken, a fourth-year student whose thoughtful and animated contributions figure prominently in these pages.

Equity Matters aims to be a source of information and ideas with a focus, but it is hoped not a narrow one, on women's concerns and activities. Comments and reactions are welcome.

Lois Reimer
Status of Women Officer

Women at U of T Day

Billed as "The Experience, Interests and Achievements of U of T Women", the exhibit featured books and a sale of crafts, and past and present events recorded on tape, in print and pictures.

The project was co-ordinated by the Status of Women Office and owes its success to the combined effort and imagination of the UTSA Status of Women Committee, the University of Toronto Women's Association, the Women's Centre, the Women's Network, and the Women's Studies Programme. A number of other organizations were also represented in the form of reports, brochures, etc. The central location - the former Bookroom at 21 King's College Circle - assured a good turnout (particularly when the rains came).

Commentary: New Hiring Proposals Demonstrably Better

The University's contentious attempt to integrate provisions for employment equity into its Policy and Procedures on Academic Appointments has seemed at times like a fight to give medicine to an old man who won't admit he's sick. Objections to the proposed policy changes have most often pointed to minutiae of diction and ignored the principle of the thing. Maybe the diagnosis of the patient's illness needs to be restated.

The question of employment equity within the North American university receives thoughtful consideration in the Hiring Handbook produced by the University of New Hampshire President's Commission on the Status of Women. This group manages, despite its cumbersome title, to give a succinct statement of the major obstacles standing between qualified women and academic appointments. "Stereotypes about the nature of women and men, myths about women's commitment to academic careers, and concern with 'fit' (finding someone just like us to join us) militate most strongly against the hiring of female faculty." Women suffer from attitudes. Stereotyping, myths and personal prejudices are deeply ingrained in the human mind and have an unconscious and unacknowledged influence on even the most well-meaning hiring agents.

The proposed amendments to the University of Toronto's academic hiring policy help to counterbalance the effects of discriminatory attitudes, whether conscious or unconscious. The four most important -- and most beleaguered -- changes can be simplified as follows. First, search committees are to include "at least one and preferably two

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faculty members of each sex"; secondly, every effort must be made to include at least one candidate of each sex on the short list; thirdly, a woman will be chosen over a man unless the male candidate is "demonstrably better" than his female counterpart; finally, the short list and its ranking of candidates must be justified in writing. The battle over these amendments has been raging for several months, and their fate hinges upon current negotiations between the administration and the Faculty Association.

One popular objection to the policy changes is that they needlessly introduce concepts of gender and gender-balance into the "purely academic process" of hiring university faculty. This point of view is charmingly naive. The whole problem lies in the fact that academic hiring has never been a "pure process" which operates exclusively on principles of academic merit. Consider, for example, the ravages of the "clonal effect," defined in the UNH Handbook as "the tendency of individuals and groups to replicate themselves." When there are many well-qualified applicants for one position, certain subtleties of personality contribute to the final decision. It is at this point that the clonal effect comes into play. Most faculty members are men; when they hire, they tend too often to favour male candidates who remind them of their younger selves. They sense that they will be able to get along well with their clones and that they're hiring people who, like themselves, will do a good job.

The proposed provisions for employment equity require that serious and, in so far as it is possible, objective consideration be given to the "purely academic" qualifications of women candidates. Women must be included on short lists, and if they are not, their exclusion must be explained in writing. Moreover, the inclusion of women on search committees will break up the men's club and its propensity for self-replication.

Consider the case in which a man was considered for a job in academia while an equally qualified woman was at first ignored because she had a husband to support her. (This eerie tale was told in a recent letter to the Bulletin.) Or consider the common assumption that women who have or plan to have children will not be as committed to their jobs as their male peers. (Another keen insight from the UNH Handbook.) These examples suggest that the "purely academic process" of hiring faculty is everywhere open to the intrusion of "polite" sexual discrimination. Why would female parents be less responsible to their employers than male parents? Let us repeat. The most effective means of averting sexual prejudice is to involve women in the hiring process -- and thereby to bring new attitudes into play -- and to establish clear and concrete written guidelines which demand that attention be paid to qualified women applicants. The University proposes to do just that. Since consciously discriminatory attitudes cannot be brought into the open without loss of face, they will remain submerged and, it is to be hoped, ineffectual in the hiring process. Policing of attitudes will catch unconscious prejudices as they come to the surface. Or so we hope.

Another, and indeed a central, objection to the proposed policy changes centres on the supposed difficulty of proving that one candidate is "demonstrably better" than another. Many have laid siege to this particular yoking of words. They fear that this instance of diction will cause selection committees which cannot convincingly justify their preference to pass over a favoured male applicant and to choose a woman of lesser qualifications. The hiring of too many such women will trip the University in its quest for excellence.

But this is a mouse of a problem giving birth to a mountain of trepidation. What exactly is the mandate of a search committee if it is not to choose from among several applicants the person best able to do the job? If hiring agents cannot demonstrate to themselves and to their colleagues that one candidate -- no matter what his or her sex -- is, to the best of their knowledge, better qualified than the other applicants, then there will never be a means of ensuring the excellence of this university's faculty. It should always be the responsibility of search committees to see to it that the candidate recommended for the vacant positon is "demonstrably better" than those applicants who were sent packing. The plan for equity does not create a new problem, but rather underscores a very old one.

Another quibble over words arises from the proposed stipulation that when two applicants are equal in ability but opposite in gender, the preferred candidate will belong to the sex which is "under-represented" in the hiring department. Our discussion has so far been working under the reasonable assumption that women are under-represented in most departments. The quibblers demand a definition of this term "under-represented". But the time is not near when the under-represented in each department will catch up with the over-represented and thus lose the privilege of being under-privileged. There is still room to ponder this knotty semantic point. In the meantime, let us not, for the sake of quibbling, delay employment equity measures which this place of higher learning so sorely needs.

C.B.

Status Quote

"Toronto is our University
Shout, oh shout, men of
ev'ry faculty."

(Chorus from "The Blue and White", long regarded as the University of Toronto song, played and sung - with varying vigour and familiarity - at official functions. Is it time for a tune-up?)

Sue Gilbert Sheridan's Gain

Suzanne Gilbert has resigned from the University of Toronto Police to become Campus Supervisor at Sheridan College of Applied Arts and Technology in Oakville.

During her seven years with the U of T force, latterly as an Investigative Officer, Sue promoted a number of community awareness programs relating to personal safety and crime prevention. Her activities included producing posters and pamphlets, meeting with staff and student groups, and organizing (with APUS as co-sponsor) a forum during National Crime Prevention Week. She was also a member of the Advisory Committee to the Status of Women Officer.

We will miss Sue's experience, sensitivity, and enthusiasm. Our warmest wishes go with her.

Thanks, but ...

No thanks. Such was the reaction of single parents to the Ontario Government's recent plan to help them undertake post-secondary education without incurring an unmanageable debt.

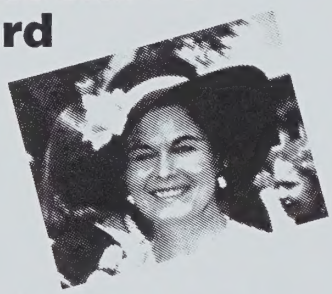
The Ministry of Colleges and Universities decided early last summer to deny sole-support parents access to student loans. At the same time, the Ministry planned to increase the value of grants available to single parents. Unfortunately, the new plan offered them less money in grants than the old plan had offered in grants combined with loans. A well-meaning attempt to make life easier for about 7000 student parents threatened to put post-secondary education out of their financial reach.

The net decrease in funding roused protests from student and women's groups and led to a complaint alleging discrimination to the Ontario Human Rights Commission. The spectre of discrimination seemed indeed to have raised its ugly head, since the neutral phrase "sole-support parent" can usually, and with no inaccuracy, be translated as "single mother".

The Ministry bowed slightly to public pressure on June 30 and agreed to give loans to the needy, provided they demonstrated a specific need for loan assistance, a criterion to which other students are not subjected. This concession appeared hardly less discriminatory than the original proposal, and a group of single mothers voiced their concerns at Queen's Park on July 7.

The Government finally - and rather belatedly - retreated with grace in late August. Sole-support parents will once again, like other students, be assessed for loans when they apply for grants. But at least a couple of disquieting questions remain. To what extent were paternalistic attitudes at work? - there were repeated Ministerial references to "single moms". How many single parents changed their plans to attend classes this fall, fearing that without loan assistance they would not be able to make ends meet? C.B.

Chancellor's Award



Georgina Anderson has received the 1987 Chancellor's Award, which is given by the University of Toronto Alumni Association to a present or past member of the administrative staff for "outstanding contribution to the University community...beyond the normal scope of duty and responsibilities". Three of the four winners since the award was established in 1984 have been women. Mrs. Anderson retired from Erindale College in September, and her award will be presented at the November 19 Convocation. Our congratulations on this signal achievement and honour!

U of T Honours Scientist

Dr. Brenda Milner, Professor of Psychology at McGill University and Head of the Neuropsychology Laboratory, Montreal Neurological Institute and Hospital, will receive an honorary Doctor of Science degree at Fall Convocation on Friday evening, November 20, 1987.

Bell Hooks on Sex, Race and Class

White 'bourgeois' feminists have too often paid too little attention to systems of domination based on differences of race and class. This unsettling point of view belongs to Bell Hooks, the noted Black American feminist who called for a revolution in attitude during her lecture at OISE on September 21.

Hooks tends to take positions contrary to the popular feminist stance, but she is an intellectual force to be reckoned with. She has published two highly regarded books of feminist social criticism -- Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism (South End Press, 1981) and Feminist Theory: from Margin to Centre (S. E. P., 1984) -- as well as a volume of poetry entitled And There We Wept. When she sheds her authorial persona, Bell Hooks becomes Dr. Gloria Watkins, professor of Afro-American Studies and English at Yale University.

Hooks does not regard patriarchal domination, the subordination of women to men through history, as the sole cause of the ongoing exploitation and oppression of women. "One of the things I urge all of us to do," she said in her talk, "is to understand the complexity of sex, race and class." According to Hooks, sexual oppression forms the

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centre of a structure of domination which cultivates not only sexism, but also racism and the economic hardship of the lower classes. It need hardly be said that, within this structure, poor, non-white women occupy the bottom of the socio-political heap.

Furthermore, white middle-class feminists can engage in the oppression of women of other races and of lower classes while endeavouring to attack the roots of patriarchal domination. How can this be so? Hooks points towards the privileged position of those feminists who take part in, and often benefit from, power structures which condone racism and 'classism'. For example, in her latest book she accuses Betty Friedan of ignoring "the existence of all non-white women and poor white women." She comments later that "Feminism is the struggle to end sexist oppression. Its aim is not to benefit any specific group of women, any particular race or class of women."

Hooks urges both women and men to develop a critical consciousness which can help to end the complacent acceptance of all systems of domination. The oppressed must help one another, for, as Hooks noted in her OISE lecture, "it would be naive to assume that those who dominate us will do the work of transformation." In particular, those women who most suffer from oppression, those who are discriminated against because of their sex and race and class, must be encouraged to help themselves. Such long-suffering victims of domination live on the margins of society. They are beaten down daily and are not critical of their condition. Before they can gain control of their lives, they must undergo a revolution in their attitudes towards themselves and their status in society.

Hooks has a practical answer to this practical problem. Women victimized as a result of their sex, race and class can be mobilized as a force of political change through what she calls the politicization of love. "I am not talking about some kind of sentimental notion of loving everyone," she warned at OISE. She said love's politicization begins when the victim of domination learns self-love and so gains "the opportunity to experience herself as a worthwhile human being." A sense of self-worth can blossom into a sense of power. "We need," she said, "the strength of self that carries on in the face of resistance and hardship." Hooks is not a simple idealist. She is calling upon the oppressed -- especially the masses of poor, apolitical non-white women -- to gird themselves for political struggle.

The genesis of a new consciousness and a new sense of power among the victims of oppression will bring about a collective political revolution against white supremacy, patriarchal domination and capitalism. Hooks does not, however, call for violence in any form. She abhors it and knows that women have too often been its victims. Rather, she looks forward to the mass recognition that existing political and social structures promote oppression and must be revamped so that those currently oppressed can have a legitimate and fulfilling place in the world.

Translating thought into action is not an easy matter. Hooks' ideas are truly challenging; they are bound to prick even the most self-satisfied conscience into introspection and soul searching. And that is precisely the point.

C.B.

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